

Notes on Portland Shipbuilding Company

The Portland Shipbuilding Company (PSC) operated in Portland, Oregon along the west bank of the Willamette River for 70 years. It first appears in the Portland Oregon Polk Directory in 1899/1900 (See ATTACHMENT A Below). Initially the address was simply ft Meade, then river front between Woods and Porter, and then ft Woods until 1917. Meade to Woods spans four blocks which terminated on the east at what is now SW Moody Avenue immediately north of the Ross Island bridge (built 1927). It is not clear if the company's operations shifted south from Meade to Woods or the directory address became more refined. (Subsequently, this area became part of the extensive Commercial Iron Works facility and later Zidell).

Beginning in 1918, a new address for PSC appears in the directories, ft Nebraska, nearly 2 miles south of the former location(s). Apparently, another ship builder named Thomas Danielson had this address in 1917 (See 1917 Polk Directory, Business Section, p. 1329, Boats and Ship Builders.) By 1935, Nebraska had become SW Nebraska, and by 1965 the company had a number address, 0800. The last Polk Directory listing for PSC is 1971. The shipyard site is now the northern part of Willamette Park.

No comprehensive history of the company was found, however passing references to PSC were encountered. Each is described in chronological order (more or less) below.

1. The October 1917 issue of Pacific Marine Review (p. 85) reported that the expansion the Columbia River Shipbuilding Company necessitated the relocation of the PSC upstream. (The Columbia River Shipbuilding Company, or Corporation, operated between 1916 and 1921, building steel freighters for the Emergency Fleet Corporation). According to the Pacific Marine Review, the PSC "devotes its attention to river vessels."

2. In 1937, PSC's bid for construction of a barge for the Bureau of Fire was recommended for acceptance (Portland City Auditor – City Recorder – Council Documents – 3198: Barge for Bureau of Fire – Record Number AF/4363 – 6/10/1937)

3. "Vintage Portland" shows a 1941 oblique aerial photo (looking north) of the future site of Willamette Park (See ATTACHMENT B below). PSC is at the top portion of the photograph. The photo caption quotes from a 1943 article in the Oregonian: "During the past 16 months, Portland Shipbuilding Company, the oldest boat-building plant in Oregon, has turned out more than a mile of barges for the army, navy, and maritime commission, and now is dropping one a week into the Willamette River." The caption goes on to say that the company "...continued to repair and rent wooden barges until 1964." Source of the photo is credited to the City of Portland Archives.

4. The volume "Port and Terminal Facilities at the Ports of Portland and Astoria, Oregon and Longview and Vancouver, Washington, 1945" contains the most extensive descriptive information of the PSC as of 1944/45. In the section "Dry Docks and Marine Railways" page 78 the report states:

"The Portland Shipbuilding Co. has ... installed a side-haul and shunt marine railway on the left bank of the river at the foot of Southwest Nebraska Street. This facility consists of 4 cradles, each 44 by 24 feet, with a combined haul-out capacity of 450 tons. The maximum depth over the keel blocks when the cradles are in outboard position is 27 to

28 feet and the minimum depth is 7 to 8 feet. The railway is served by a 10-ton steam locomotive crane equipped with a 55-foot boom.”

A table accompanying this section (page 79) states that the largest vessel that could be accommodated was 165 feet in length and 30 foot draft.

PSC appears in the section entitled “Marine Repair Plants” pages 80-81. In the category “Repair Equipment” carpenter and machine shops are shown for PSC. Under “Nature of Repairs Undertaken” repairs to wood vessels and wood hulls are listed. In the section on “Floating Equipment” page 91, PSC had 21 open barges available, based at different locations and suitable for a variety of cargos.

4. In 1961, PSC was awarded a contract to repair a houseboat for the Bureau of Fire at a cost not to exceed \$13,000 (Portland City Auditor – City Recorder – Council Ordinance – 113887 – Record Number AF/145416 – 7/27/1961)

5. In 1968, the City of Portland initiated negotiations to buy the PSC property to augment Willamette Park. In the event that negotiations were unsuccessful, the city was prepared to condemn the property. Negotiations were successful and an ordinance providing funds for the purchase passed in February 1969. (See Portland City Auditor – City Recorder – Council Ordinance – 128409 – Record Number AF/127562 – 1/22/1969 and Council Ordinance 128565 – Record Number AF/128980 – 2/19/1969).

Despite its longevity, PSC never appears to have been a large company. Their listings in the Polk Directories were always minimal. Unlike some of their larger competitors, they did not describe their products or services.

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ATTACHMENT A

Portland Polk Directories at the Seattle Public Library, Main Branch, were consulted for information on the subject company in December 2013 and January 2014. The General Directory, “White Pages” (W), and the Classified Business Directory (B) were reviewed. The results are shown below.

1895

No Listing

1899/1900

Portland Ship Building Co (James Olsen, Christian Honnes, Charles M Nelson), ft Meade (W 555)

Portland Ship Building Co, ft Meade (B 730, Boat and Ship Builders)

1900/1901

Portland Ship Building Co. (Inc) (James Olsen, Christian Honnes, Charles M. Nelson) ft Meade (W 584)

Portland Ship Building Co., ft Meade (B 776, Boats and Ship Building)

1905

Portland Ship Building Co, Christian Honnes pres, Charles M Nelson sec, treas and mngr, river front bet Woods and Porter (W 871)

Portland Ship Building Co, river front bet Woods and Porter. (B 1164, Boats and Ship Builders)

1910

Portland Ship Building Co, Christian Honnes pres, Chas M Nelson sec-mngr, river front bet Woods and Porter (W 908)

Portland Ship Building Co river front bet Woods and Porter (B 1362, Boats and Ship Builders)

1915

Portland Ship Building Co (Albert Nelson, Christen Christensen) ft Woods (W 976)

Portland Ship Building Co ft Woods (B 1367, Boats and Ship Builders)

1916

Portland Ship Building Co (Albert Nelson, Christen Christensen) ft Woods (W 983)

Portland Ship Building Co ft Woods (B 1336, Boats and Ship Builders)

1917

Portland Ship Building Co C M Nelson pres Albt Nelson sec ft Woods (W 931)

Portland Ship Building Co ft Woods (B 1511, Ship Builders not Boats and Ship Builders)

1918

Portland Shipbuilding Co Chas M Nelson pres Albt Nelson sec ft Nebraska (W 1156)

Portland Shipbuilding Co ft Nebraska (B 1846, Ship Builders)

1919/20

Portland Shipbuilding Co Chas M Nelson pres Albt Nelson sec ft Nebraska (W 1156)

Portland Shipbuilding Co ft Nebraska (B 1846, Ship Builders)

1925

Portland Ship Building Co Inc C M Nelson pres Albt Nelson sec ft Nebraska (W 1280)

Portland Ship Building Co ft Nebraska (B 1854, Ship Builders)

1930

Portland Shipbuilding Co Chas M Nelson pres Albrt K Nelson sec-treas ft Nebraska (W 1327)

Portland Shipbuilding Co ft Nebraska (B 2513, Ship Builders)

1935

Portland Shipbuilding Co Albert K Nelson sec-treas ft SW Nebraska (W 1029)

Portland Shipbuilding Co ft SW Nebraska (B 2024, Ship Builders)

1940

Portland Shipbuilding Co Inc Albert K Nelson pres Chas M Nelson treas ft SW Nebraska (W 1197)

Portland Shipbuilding Co Inc SW Nebraska (B 2423, Ship Builders)

1943/44

Portland Shipbuilding Co Albert K Nelson pres Chas M Nelson sec-treas ft SW Nebraska (W 1378)

Portland Shipbuilding Co ft SW Nebraska (B 2618, Ship Builders)

1950

Portland Shipbuilding Co A K Nelson pres C M Nelson sec-treas ft of SW Nebraska (W 868)

Portland Shipbuilding Co SW Nebraska at ft (B 1976, Ship Builders)

1955

Portland Shipbuilding Co (Albert K Nelson) ft SW Nebraska (W 876)

Portland Shipbuilding Co ft SW Nebraska (B 1817, Ship Builders) (only company listed)

1960

Portland Shipbuilding Co Albert K Nelson pres Charles M Nelson sec-treas ft SW Nebraska (W 872)

Portland Shipbuilding Co ft SW Nebraska (B 251, Ship Builders)

1965

Portland Shipbuilding Co Albert K Nelson pres Charles M Nelson sec-treas 0800 SW Nebraska St (W 789)

Portland Shipbuilding Co 0800 SW Nebraska St (B 206, Ship Builders)

1968

Portland Shipbuilding Co Albert K Nelson pres Charles M Nelson sec-treas 0800 SW Nebraska St (W 818)

Portland Shipbuilding Co 0800 SW Nebraska St (B 208, Ship Builders)

1969

Portland Shipbuilding Co Albert K Nelson pres Charles M Nelson sec-treas 0800 SW Nebraska St (W 780)

Portland Shipbuilding Co 0800 SW Nebraska St (B 184, Ship Builders)

1970

Portland Shipbuilding Co Albert K Nelson pres Charles M Nelson sec-treas 0800 SW Nebraska St (W 819)

Portland Shipbuilding Co 0800 SW Nebraska St (B 191, Ship Builders)

1971

Portland Shipbuilding Co Albert K Nelson Pres Charles M Nelson sec-treas 0800 SW Nebraska St (W 792)

Portland Shipbuilding Co 0800 SW Nebraska St (B 177, Ship Builders)

1972

No Listing

ATTACHMENT B
(Vintage Portland)

Willamette Park, 1941

What we know as Willamette Park today was in 1941 an undeveloped riverside parcel. The Portland Shipbuilding Co. complex is at SW Nebraska St. at the top of the photo. A 1943 article in The Oregonian stated, "During the last 16 months, Portland Shipbuilding Company, the oldest boat-building plant in Oregon, has turned out more than a mile of barges for the army, navy, and maritime commission, and now is dropping one a week into the Willamette River." It continued to repair and rent wooden barges until 1964. Macadam Ave. is at far upper left.



(City of Portland Archives)